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The Ordinary Visitation

OF THE

ARCHDEACONRY OF SURREY,

NOVEMBER 1842,

BY

SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, M.A.

CHAPLAIN TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE ALBERT,
ARCHDEACON OF SURREY.

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TO
THE REVEREND THE CLERGY,
AND TO
THE CHURCHWARDENS
OF
THE ARCHDEACONRY OF SURREY,

This Charge,

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS INSCRIBED

BY THEIR AFFECTIONATE BROTHER AND FRIEND,

SAMUEL WILBERFORCE.

A C H A R G E,

ETC.

MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

SINCE we last gathered together at this our annual meeting, I have been able in great measure to complete that parochial visitation of the archdeaconry which I then proposed. There are, indeed, a few parishes which I have still to visit; but there is no considerable district with which I have not made a personal acquaintance. The results of this inspection I desire briefly to lay before you. First, however, you will, I trust, allow me to satisfy my own feelings by the expression of my hearty thanks to you, my reverend brethren, for the marked kindness with which I have been every where received, for the hospitality which has awaited me at every turn, and the readiness to help forward my endeavours which has been manifest on every side.

To the churchwardens also of the archdeaconry I would publicly express my obligations for their willing attendance and assistance in my attempts to discharge the duties of my office. Never certainly would remissness in one intrusted with its charge be less excusable, than when there is so manifest

a disposition in those with whom he has to co-operate, to appreciate and to assist his efforts.

The impression I have gathered from my inspection of the parish-churches of the county is, upon the whole, of an encouraging complexion. With some few exceptions, these hallowed heir-looms of our land are yet sound in the material part of their structure ; their ecclesiastical character, though often humble in its pretensions, is, in its main outlines at least, undestroyed ; whilst the injuries which past negligence or ignorance have inflicted on them are capable of remedy. In many of the village-churches much has been done within these last few years : some have been absolutely dug out of the ground which long neglect had suffered to accumulate round them, to the destruction of the symmetry of their proportions, and the grievous injury of the building from damp and want of ventilation. The broken pavements, crumbling windows, decayed seats, and mouldy walls of too many more, no longer continue to reproach the impiety which had surrounded them with houses “ ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion,” whilst it wantonly or indolently permitted the house of God to lie ruinous and waste. New churches, too, have risen both amongst the crowded multitudes of our metropolitan district, and in many an out-lying hamlet of our rural parishes.

Yet much remains undone ; and it is rather from the evident awakening of better feelings in a multi-

tude of quarters, than from what has been already effected, that I gather my chief encouragement. Still are there multitudes amongst us who know no pastor's voice, who have no place in any house of God; still is it too often a painful and humiliating thing to enter the parish-churches which we inherit from our fathers' piety. We find, perhaps in some remote district,¹ the ancient building preserving marked traces of the unsparing expense at which it was erected, and by which it was adorned. The hands of its founders and its gravers have long since mouldered into the dust of the surrounding churchyard. Alas, that with them should have been too often buried the blessed spirit which led men to delight in rearing up and making beautiful the altar of their God! For what do we see now? Their poor estates have grown great with the increasing wealth of the land. The houses in which the fathers dwelt have been found too strait for the children; palaces have sprung up instead of mansions; every land and every climate have been ransacked to furnish the beautiful woods, the costly silks and carpeting, which minister to their magnificence and ease. The abundance of wealth has even overflowed the dwelling-house itself; the fruit and flowers which our fathers knew not cluster on our walls, or scent our gardens. And how, meanwhile, has it fared with the house

¹ The village-church of Leigh, Staffordshire, is a good illustration.

of God ? There, as it seems, alone all expense is grudged. The narrow walls have never expanded for an increasing population ; nay, its straitened area has been too often made straiter still by the grasping hand which has seized on the best situations on which to erect private enclosures, which are carpeted, and cushioned, and warmed, to secure as large a share as possible of merely personal comfort, whilst the surrounding building is suffered daily to grow poorer and more waste. Unshapely galleries block up its windows, in which the beautiful stone tracery of other times has been replaced, when repairs became unavoidable, by the commonest materials : other windows have been closed wholly, because to close was cheaper than to restore them. For the same cause whole arches have been walled up, and their very aisles demolished ; whilst on every side the waste of gradual decay, or the meanness of cheap repairs, give an air of depressing desolation to the sacred building.

This is but too faithful a picture of holy places bordering upon private mansions which are decked and furnished with every instrument of splendour and luxury. And surely that so it should be, is a fearful sign that there has grown widely up amongst us an earthly, luxurious, and unchristian temper, which has lowered the general standard, and thus injured grievously even the best amongst our people. For though, doubtless, superstitious motives, from which

we, thank God, are free, mingled often with better purposes in the minds of those who spent of old thus nobly, it is a deep disgrace to us that, instead of purifying the motive, we have renounced the zeal; and when we learned that we could not purchase heaven with our offerings, have therefore ceased to offer to the Lord our God.

For surely motives enough remain to quicken us in this peculiar work. To say nothing of the plain duty of building new churches in our crowded districts; surely from a grateful spirit, to adorn God's house with every lawful ornament; to make it wide enough to admit with decency and ease an increasing population to KNEEL within its precincts; to provide for its being even outwardly of a gracious aspect in the eyes of those who should come there to listen to God's word, and to offer up their supplications to Him; to let the common home of the religious sympathies of all around us be that which we most cheerfully adorn with the rich materials and the finished skill which wealth commands; surely thus to make the temple of the Lord beautiful, and the sanctuary of His poor commodious, is the acting of a fit and well-instructed piety.

And that such a temper has revived amongst us is a matter of most cheering certainty. We may trace its growth, as elsewhere, so in our own county, where, in more than one instance, the fir-tree has been exchanged for the cedar; and where, in many parish-

churches, there has been an evident and increasing desire to honour God in restoring and even beautifying His house.

But the very rise of this temper, and the restorations of which it gives promise, render it of especial importance that the official guardians of our churches should understand what are their powers, and what their duties, as to the sacred fabrics intrusted to their care.

On this subject, then, I will beg for a few minutes for the especial attention of the churchwardens who are present; and I do this with more confidence, because I have observed, with the greatest satisfaction, the high-minded old English conscientiousness with which, in the vast majority of instances, those who are put in charge with this important office set themselves in these times (which often present cases of no little difficulty) to the upright and unflinching performance of their duty.

The churchwardens are by law the Bishop's parochial officers; as such they are put in charge of the fabric of the church, and all its furniture. The fabric they are bound to see kept in fit repair, and, with the churchyard, free from all profane uses whatever. The furniture of the church is also in their charge, and they are to provide whatever is needful for the public worship of God according to the rites of the English Church. Thus they have been called of old "wardens of the goodes, workis, and ornamentes of the Church." This

is here the limit of their authority ; they are to preserve, not to alter or to alienate ; they have no power to part with any of the church goods, or to permit any addition to or alteration of the fabric within or without, unless they have the Bishop's license for such alteration. This I desire especially to press upon the wardens. If without the sanction of the ordinary, they permit any changes to be made in the churches under their care, whether effected under the name of repairs or not, whether with or without the sanction of the vestry, they are doing an illegal act, for the penalties of which they render themselves responsible. Thus, removing an ancient spire because it is found expensive to repair it ; closing doors into the church, or altering the internal arrangements of the church ; erecting new pews and galleries ; all of these are beyond their power, without the consent of the ordinary. I mention these points because, as to each one of them, I have met recently with instances which shew that the churchwardens are not always aware of the serious responsibilities in which they may involve themselves by such unlawful conduct. Pews, however, furnish commonly the ground of such difficulties, and it may therefore be useful to point out distinctly what is the power of the churchwarden as to them.

The whole interior arrangement of the church is vested by law in the Bishop, for the benefit of the parishioners at large. "As," says Lord Coke, "it is

a place dedicated and consecrated to the service of God, and is common to all the inhabitants, it therefore belongs to the Bishop to order it in such manner as the services of God may best be celebrated, and that there be no contention in the Church." There are, that is, no original private rights within the body of the church : it is God's house—the home and the sanctuary of His poor, where rich and poor meet together, not as rich and poor, but as one in the blessed equality of true brotherhood in Christ. Of these common rights the Bishop is the trustee ; and he, therefore, must consent to every erection within the church, because such an erection may interfere with those rights. Thus, when it was found convenient to erect fixed seats in our churches, permission to erect them could be obtained only from the Bishop, and he had the distribution of them. This distribution he exercises in two ways : first, by what is called a faculty ; and, secondly, through the churchwardens. By a faculty the Bishop permits a particular seat to be set apart for the use of the occupiers of a certain house or messuage in the parish, in respect of such messuage ; and having given this faculty, he has so far created a right to that seat, and taken it thenceforward out of his own power. He therefore cannot, and still less can the churchwardens, disturb the occupiers of that house in that possession. This, then, is what gives a right to a particular seat—its having been granted to the occupier of a particular

house by the Bishop. And there are two ways in which this right may be established in the courts of law. First, by producing a legal faculty from the Bishop; and, secondly, by proving what is called prescription—that is, proving that, though the faculty is lost, there is good reason to believe that one was once given. The mode of doing this is by shewing that the occupiers of a certain house have long sat in a certain seat, and have been used to repair it. But this must be proved for so long a time as to render it probable that the Bishop did once issue such a faculty, or the sitting in the pew and the repairing it will both together give no legal title to its possession. If, however, the faculty is produced, and is itself a legal one, or if by prescription it can be shewn to be probable that there was once such a faculty, then that seat is so far taken out of the Bishop's power. But the rest of the church remains at his disposal as it was before, and by the churchwardens he administers it. This, therefore, shews what their power is. In every existing pew within the body of the church which is not held by a faculty or by prescription, they can, as the Bishop's officers, and subject to an appeal to him, seat any parishioner. This power they are bound to exercise so as to accommodate the greatest number, regarding, as far as possible, the convenience of all, and not wantonly disturbing any who have been seated by their predecessors. But they have no power to build any new pew, or to

enlarge one already existing, or to turn a free sitting into a pew, or to give permission to another party to erect one for himself, or in any other way to encroach or suffer encroachments upon the common right of every parishioner to a place in the house of God. Neither they alone, nor the whole parish in vestry with them, possess this right; and if they attempt to exercise it, they make themselves responsible for an illegal act, with all the consequences of its illegality. Before any alteration whatever is made in a parish-church, the concurrence of the ordinary must be obtained; if there is any difference of opinion amongst the parishioners, a faculty for the proposed alteration must issue from the Bishop's Court; but if there be none, the mere sanction of the Bishop (which may be obtained directly from himself or through the Archdeacon) will suffice.

It is of great moment that the law on this point should be clearly understood, as it will henceforth be strictly enforced by those whose duty it is to enforce it. Neglect of this in times past, as well as too great readiness to grant faculties, has brought the interior of most of our churches into a state which calls most urgently for some immediate and stringent redress. In a mere clamour against pews, if by pews are meant fixed seats of convenient construction and just allotment, I am not disposed to join. I have no sympathy with views recently put forward with great ability by a writer on this subject, who would remove

from our churches all facilities for sitting. That our fixed seats were one consequence of that Reformation for which we can never be too deeply grateful to Almighty God, is with me no discredit to them. With the great men who, in the 17th century, did resist their novel formation, we shall do well to object to their abuse, and not to their existence.¹ Wholly unsuitable as they no doubt are for a worship which consists chiefly in gazing upon the official devotion of another, they may assist the "common prayer" of our reformed Church, they are suitable to our national character, they tend to foster habits of family religion, and, by preventing the inconvenient confusion of different classes, they may, whilst they protect his rights, be even more welcome to the feelings of the poor man than of the rich.

But that these advantages attend their use is no justification of their abuse; and that they have been greatly abused, the churches of any district will prove. During my parochial visitation, I have met with manifold instances of the evils to which I refer. For the most part, the oldest pewing is, in all essen-

¹ In the curious "History of Pews" published by the Cambridge Camden Society, it is plain that the objections of Bishops Montagu and Wren were not to pews, but to "pews or new seats erected by private men on their own authority;" or, again, to "seats or pews which hinder and encumber the neighbours in hearing God's word and performing Divine service;" and, once more, to "high and close pews," which made it impossible for the wardens to present for irregularity of behaviour.

tial matters, far the best. It is the most adapted to general devotion, and the most suited to the architectural character of the church. The earliest seats are the lowest, the widest (both important assistants to general kneeling); they are the most regular, the most substantial, of the best materials, and, above all, the least unjust in their arrangement. The first change is commonly marked by the insertion between the oak-benches of anomalous deal-doors. These are followed by deal skirting-boards raising the sides of the old oak-seats. As you advance up the nave, large square seats, with sides often six feet high, entirely of deal, painted or unpainted without, and often of matting or green baize within, swallow wholly up the old oak-benches. Soon after these, a gallery has commonly appeared, blocking up the arches, choking the windows over which it stretches, and oppressing with its low ceiling the worshippers below.

All this is bad enough as a mere disfigurement of the church; but in its moral aspect it is far worse. For this change in the character of the seats has been the consequence of the private appropriation of what once were acknowledged as the common rights of the parishioners. It is wealth, or parish influence, or some other earthly power, which has enabled pretension, even in God's house, to seize upon benches which were freely occupied before by humble worshippers, and to appropriate their Christian birth-

right to the maintenance of its own barren grandeur. The degree to which this evil has risen can hardly be suspected without a detailed examination of our churches. In my progress through this archdeaconry I have found chancels, which, within these few years, contained benches free to all, wholly engulfed in two vast pews allotted to the squire ; in other cases, I have found all the best parts of the nave entirely engrossed by private pews of similar dimensions and allotment, in each of which sit two or three straggling inmates, nursing their separate dignity. Whilst in others, a vast pew, raised up to the height of a low gallery, absolutely shuts out the whole chancel from the church, rendering even the rubrical performance of the service thenceforth impossible.

And what has been the fruit of these encroachments ? Heartburnings without measure and without end are their first consequence ; hardly any one is satisfied with his division of the spoil ; whilst of the dispossessed, too many go henceforth to the meeting ; too many no where at all ; or if, from a better spirit, they still remain, being old perhaps, and (as the outdoor labourers commonly become, at least in some degree) deaf also, they are thrust into the most distant, dark, and draughty corners of the church.

Surely it is a deep disgrace to us that so it should be. Even in worldly matters, in civil rights, in these mere outer things, it is the very office of Christianity to be the poor man's advocate and guardian ; to with-

stand the selfish world on its own highway. It has ever been the boast of Christ's Church, that His poor have been her special care ; and shall we now tamely suffer the world, in its foulest features of pretension, aggression, luxury, and self-appropriation, to enter into the very sanctuary of our God, and thrusting out His poor, to fix upon His temple as its home ? The injury which this has done to the church-going habits of the poor is beyond calculation :¹ for it is not merely (though that is a great matter) that they have been often dispossessed of those parts of the common building which were almost essential to their worship ; but beyond this, that the sense of the allowed pretension of earthly riches in the very house of God has eaten into the hearts of the poor, and given a sense of unreality to that form of religion with which it has thus in their minds become associated. Thus, I heard recently with pain, the common village-criticism on a small rural church, which the new gallery of a rich parishioner almost overshadowed, "Yes, the great man must be lifted up above his neighbours."

The evils I have here spoken of belong especially to the rural districts of the archdeaconry. For, alas, amongst the multitudes who crowd its

¹ The instances, alas, are too frequent for enumeration. It is more cheering to refer, in proof of the assertion, to the firm affection of the poor to their Church in parishes where their rights have been respected. Thus, in the parish of Bishop's Waltham, Hants, where the best seats in the church have always been kept for the poor, dissent is scarcely known.

suburban parts, the poor have been long since in effect driven from the narrow walls of our old churches,¹ and even yet, in spite of all that has been done in church-building, this evil is in a great measure unredressed. From the necessity of raising stipends for our ministers by pew-rents, and from other causes also, our new buildings are seldom what our parish churches used of old to be—the equal home of the richest and the poorest. These are great practical evils, especially in a state of society like ours at present. The tendency of all things round us is to break our people into separate and unsympathising classes, and thus to sow amongst us broadcast the deadly seeds of intestine discord. The unity of the Church's worship, in which the rich and poor might mix together freely, would be a blessed safeguard from this danger. Their separation there, is one of its greatest aggravations; and to remove this, we must build largely, and endow new churches, and we must open our closed pews and give back the poor their rights. This cannot be effected, to the requisite extent, without such legal measures as shall modify the common-law rights, within which pews held by faculty or prescription are now entrenched; and urgent is the need

¹ The present state of the parishes in the Borough is truly appalling. In Bermondsey, with a population exceeding 36,000, there are only two churches and four clergymen; or one to every 9,000 souls. In the neighbouring parish of St. George's the evil is almost as great.

of some such enactment :¹ nothing could more powerfully assist the efforts now being made to increase the church-accommodation of our land. There is no act of substantial justice more due to the body of our population : but, in the mean time, it is the duty of the churchwardens, (1.) to permit no new encroachments whatever ; and (2.) to endeavour to diminish existing evils, by availing themselves of all opportunities afforded by the whole or partial repewing of their churches, for extinguishing such supposed rights

¹ In the report of the Commissioners on Ecclesiastical Courts, presented in 1832, some such arrangements are strongly recommended. The recommendations of the report are in brief as follows :

“That in future no faculties shall be granted, permanently annexing to any messuage a pew in the church or chancel.

“ That a commission shall issue in each diocese, directed to the archdeacon or archdeacons, or one or more of the rural deans, requiring them, in conjunction with two other individuals, to make a full investigation as to the pews and seats claimed to be held in each parish church or chapel by faculty or prescription ; that where such claims shall be established to the satisfaction of the commissioners, a record of the same, to be kept in the registry of the diocese, should be made. *We think it exceedingly desirable that all claims where no faculty or legal prescription exists, should be finally extinguished.* . . . When once the claims at present existing are disposed of, we are of opinion that the greatest difficulties in the way of a beneficial apportionment of church-room will be removed. . . . It is not fitting that the convenience of the parishioners in general should be sacrificed to the exclusive accommodation of any individuals ; and therefore we submit, that in all cases where it may be expedient to repair, enlarge, or rebuild the church, it shall be competent for the bishop or archdeacon to direct pews, though held by faculty or prescription, to be removed ; and, on the church being restored, the owners of such pews shall be entitled to other pews in lieu thereof, as nearly as may be of the same size, and with the same convenience of situation.”—*General Report of Ecclesiastical Commissioners*, pp. 132–134.

wherever it is possible, and changing the modern high-sided square seats into others of an earlier and better type. The right performance of this duty will be best secured, by their being careful in all cases, as a preliminary step, to lay plans of all proposed changes before the proper ecclesiastical authorities.

But there are other duties besides these of which I now have spoken which belong to our church-wardens. They are in the eye of the Church far more than mere curators of the sacred goods and fabrics ; they are, in the strictest sense of the term, ecclesiastical officers. The decency and morals of the parish are committed to a great extent to their charge. Their first duty is in the parish-church, where they have been always charged to see that all men “ behave orderly, soberly, and reverently, kneeling at the prayers, standing at the belief, and sitting or standing quietly at the reading of the Scriptures, or the preaching of God’s word ;”¹ that “ no idle persons loiter in the porch or churchyard during time of service.”² Nay, so fully are they invested with the functions of ecclesiastical officers, that they are charged to suffer “ no stranger to preach in their church, of whose orders and license they are not satisfied.”³ Beyond the precincts of the church, moreover, they are still invested with the same character. All indecency and irregularity of life, all wilful neglect

¹ Canon 18.

² Canon 19.

³ Canon 28, 48, 50, A. D. 1603.

of public worship,¹ and other such-like violations of public order, fall under their notice, and are to be by them presented at the visitations of the diocese. I need not tell you how commonly this part of their office has slipped into disuse. Alas, our disorders proclaim the silence of their authorised rebukers. Nor would it now, I fear, be possible at once to resume this practice with effect. The difficulties which from the first have impeded, seem now to render almost impossible the due discharge of this most important part of the churchwarden's office. How this evil might be remedied, I will not venture here to speculate. But thus much I will say, that I am firmly convinced that no attempt at restoring discipline in any measure, can possibly succeed which proceeds upon the plan of committing its conduct and details to the clergy as a separate body. The laity are—never let it be forgotten—as much “the Church” as are the clergy; and the attempt to exalt the clerical order by committing to their hands exclusively the reins of discipline has only issued hitherto in the subversion of all healthful orders of correction.

It is of the more moment to notice this, because there seems to be a rising persuasion that the Church cannot long maintain her ground unless some means are taken to give form and substance to the faint and still fading shadow of discipline which scarcely sur-

¹ Canon 90, 6 Edw. VI. cap. 1. sec. 2, &c.

vives amongst us. That discipline, I hardly need remind you, must consist, not in any, the very smallest, civil infliction, but in her possessing and exercising the power of suspending or even excluding from her communion notorious and hardened offenders. To what extent our want of this power has injured us, it is impossible to calculate. Never certainly before since her foundation has the Church been without this outward mark of her spiritual authority; and even now she stands alone amidst the surrounding sects, each one of which claims for itself, and claims successfully, this power of self-purification, which is almost withheld from her. It is true that the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act has removed the civil penalties to which repelling an unworthy communicant before exposed the clergy. But the power of performing this single act is far below the necessities of the case. A Church without discipline is a new and a fearful experiment.

In this great and difficult matter it is of the first importance that any movement should be in the right direction; that its single purpose should be the purification of the whole body of the Church from spots and blemishes; that in doing this it should make no fanciful separation between laity and clergy, whether as enforcing or being subject to discipline, but should tend to take in, and not to exclude, the lay members of the Church from this their privilege and duty.

And, in the meantime, much may be done. Your own moral and religious conduct, my lay brethren, in your several parishes will give at once to your office a great and real weight. To this your official character especially obliges you. You should be the pattern by which other parishioners can try and mould themselves. You should set plainly before them the living image of a sober, earnest, Church-of-England Christian. You may be the best council and assistants of your several pastors. In the great work in which they are engaged, you have with them the deepest stake: they will welcome thankfully your help; for no other earthly strength can equally support them: the pastor, who has thus gathered in his lay people to his aid, is strong indeed; and your labours will share his reward: for you too in your office may be doing good service to our heavenly Master, and helping to heal the bitter waters of society around you.

Never, surely, was there a time when the hearty, earnest efforts of all who fear God and love their country were more loudly called for. The recent disturbances in one part of our land; the threatening aspect of society even now in others; the want of employment, the stagnation of trade; and yet more by far, as indicating a deeper root of evil, the widely spread endeavours, for the vilest purposes of gain, to poison the minds of the great mass of our working population; the want of coherence, and affection,

and trust, between the various classes of society ; our dissent, our distrust, our internal variance in the deepest things which stir the souls of men :—these are most alarming symptoms of our social as well as moral state. Surely they do declare that God has a controversy with us ; that He is stirring us as a nation with these warnings of adversity, that we may repent and turn to Him before it be too late.

It is, then, a time in which all who fear Him should be watching and labouring earnestly ; but chiefly, my reverend brethren, should we who keep God's watch upon the battlements of our land, chiefly should we, at such a time, be earnestly awake. All things round us call us to be ready : great powers, for good or evil, are struggling around us, as in a confused uncertain birth, and upon our faithfulness the issue in great measure must depend. It is no escape from this truth to allege, that so it has ever seemed to each succeeding generation in its turn ; that seen near at hand the features of each present danger have always worn the most appalling aspect ; that the now has always seemed uncertain, always been fading into the coming, always threatening the endurance of all things ; that dangers have ever been around Christ's Church ; that always it has seemed she must be swept away by the great earth-flood, and that with her all social peace and order would be utterly obliterated. No doubt this is true, for such is the law of our being : " The judge standeth behind

the door." Ever since He left this earth who ascended from the hill at Bethany, He has been returning—some glow has ever rested on the eastern skies. But it is no less true, that as the time of His sure coming draweth nigh, these signs of His approach wax clearer and more definite. The gleaming streaks of a coming morning mount up the skies; the voices which usher in its presence are multiplying round us; the hum, and the crowd, and the tread of an awakening world rise in full tide upon the watcher's ears; all things that are are shaken, holding themselves in an eager readiness for the new order of the coming day. It is ours to prepare all things for this issue: whether He come speedily, or yet delay His coming, to do as our forefathers in the faith have done before us; to heal society round us; to prepare it for the unknown path on which it must enter; for the changes through which it must pass.

For such changes are inevitable. All national life is ever drifting on in a mighty current, which the strongest hand cannot for an instant stay. Each succeeding generation sees round it a new scene of circumstance and being. We sweep past the roots of mighty mountains, of which the distant tops were but just visible to long-sighted men amongst our fathers. New interests spring up; new combinations arrange themselves, and gather into solid strength. The whole face of society becomes altered round men unawares: they endeavour to act upon their old

rules, and find, with surprise, from the unexpected issue, how mighty a transformation had passed upon all around them whilst they dreamed not of it. And it is one inevitable condition of all such changes, that they stamp more and more deeply upon every usage of society the brand and impress of selfishness, unless Christianity is ever present and ever active to redress the evil. And by redressing this, she becomes the great preserver of Christian nations, saving them from that destruction to which the mere natural upgrowth of institutions amongst fallen men inevitably tends. For that selfishness, which is always intertwining its poisonous presence with all human institutions, is a stifling, a corrupting, and a disjoining thing; it debases all national character in a thousand ways, and dissolves the very inner spirit which pervaded and held together the outer framework of society; and it is the very attribute of Christianity to strive from the first against this selfishness. And hence is there ever in the Church of Christ the truest power of prophecy, whereby she still interprets to men the ambiguous letters of present things, which the "fingers of a hand" still trace upon their walls, and which, when read out, are the surest presage of the coming future. Thus it is that by an heavenly instinct, proportioned exactly to her faith and purity, she has ever met, and ever prevented, throughout Christendom, the emergent wants of society, which, if they are not thus met, are sure to break forth in

those fearful convulsions which suddenly upheave and desolate the whole surface of political and social life.

And this inner power it is ours, my reverend brethren, to call into action. Not by becoming politicians—God forbid that we should so quit our proper calling!—but by cleaving closely to that calling; by walking more with Him “whom the world seeth not;” by being men of a deeper piety, of more earnest prayer, of a keener insight into God’s living word, and so into the hidden law of all things; by searching our own hearts, and thus knowing the hearts of our brethren; by being so dead to the world, that her sorceries cannot pass on us; and, therefore, that, seeing through her empty juggleries, we may proclaim to men where they may indeed find the great truths for which their thirsty spirits are vainly seeking amongst her delusions.

Thus whilst we labour each one with our own charge, we may be really the healers of our land, and its great protectors from social disorganisation. For all wide-spread popular troubles and general discontents do indeed point at some great social want or evil. It is therefore a short-sighted policy which would merely stifle this voice of complaint; rather should its accents, broken often and inarticulate as they needs must be, guide us to the redressing of the evil which they indicate. And for this we must trace it to its first principle. And here we need a higher wisdom than mere earthly policy can furnish. The

moral faults of this age become, by the living inwrought principle of retribution, the social and political plagues of the next. These, therefore, Christianity discovers and heals at the fountain-head. The merely worldly politician finds the sullen storm brooding over him in its blackness, and, with his best expedients, knows not how to turn aside its violence; break it must: but the Church, if she exist in her purity and her vigour, will have drawn off upon the mountain's brow, in fertilising showers, the mists and vapours which would otherwise have gathered into the depth of the thunder-cloud.

Thus it is no doubt with us at this time. The evils which threaten us now are most plainly the outgrown sins of the coldness of heart of the preceding century. What is Chartism, in all its variety of forms, but the headstrong violence of men intrusted for the first time with some measure of political power, and who, whilst groaning under the sufferings which are more or less necessarily connected with the unequal distribution of wealth, have been taught to believe it possible by merely earthly machinery to redress this manifold evil? Whence, then, does this spring but from the sin which suffered whole classes of our countrymen to grow up without the influence of Christian truth, ignorant of their true redressor, and therefore easily befooled by the emptiest promise of deliverance from any quarter? Instead, therefore, of indulging angry feelings

against these our brethren, our souls should yearn over them as men we have neglected hitherto ; whose errors are our own reproach ; to whom we owe a vast debt of Christian sympathy and love ; who are only dangerous, because their deepest plagues have been left by us unhealed.

A new illustration of this truth has just fallen in my way, in a return, which I have privately received, of the state of education amongst the various prisoners brought recently for trial before the special commission which followed the late riots in Cheshire, Lancashire, and Staffordshire. This return gives us—

The number of those who either could not read and	
write at all, or could do so most imperfectly . . .	491
Those who could read and write well, only . . .	73
And as having received a superior education . . .	1

Doubtless if, when society was first assuming amongst us the new phase of a dense manufacturing population, the Church had been able at once to expand all her powers so as to leaven the rapidly extending mass, she would, by virtue of her spiritual instincts, have forecast, and, by her innate powers, have prevented the dangers by which we are now encompassed.

And, in like manner, what are those other forms of evil which we have seen gathered into the common head of Socialism, but the outgrown religious dissent of the preceding generation ? What are they, but the moral history of those who have run through all

sects, until, in the vexation of their weary spirits, they believe that all religion is sectarian; and who, therefore, having given up with Christianity the first principles which hold together family and social life, are now groping blindly after an impossible unity amidst the pollutions of a low and selfish sensuality? What then, again, is this, but the fruit of that practical unbelief, which did, in the last generation, drive whole masses of our countrymen to seek amongst dissenters from our national communion, that reality and earnestness of personal piety, of which, alas, so little trace was visible in the Church, which alone can be their true and lasting home. Here again the sins of that age are become the scourges of this.

And what may be before us God knows; but thus much is certain: with us, of His goodness, are still those healing powers, and that forecasting instinct, which alone can save this people from civil and social misery. Let it be our part, my reverend brethren, faithfully and earnestly, in our own spheres, to bring them to bear upon society around us. Let us believe in the true life of that heavenly system of which we are the ordained ministers; let us act as those to whom is indeed committed a "dispensation of the grace of God;" not going back to dead forms of by-gone times, as if they were the life which, it may be, did once act through them, nor striving to force all things into channels through which in their season they have flowed, and which they now have left; but

believing in the reality of the spiritual powers with which we are armed ; believing in the true presence of Christ with us, and therefore bending all our strength, not to revive old customs, but to quicken spiritual life within our Church and nation. If we do this faithfully, we need not look back wistfully to older and it may be worn-out forms, and weep as if with them all life was departed from us. The same power which did then penetrate and quicken the earthly element around it, will enable us too, in our day, to fill with heavenly life every form of outer things by which we are surrounded on all sides. The Church has, through God's help, been giving clear proofs of its true being amongst us ; yea, by every blessed mark of inner life, He in whom is all her strength has graciously declared His presence with us. By the quickening of holiness within her borders ; by the spreading of her arms abroad ; by the restored affection of her children ; by her increased colonial episcopate ; by all of these and by many more encouragements, our Lord is bidding us arise in His might and do the work which He has set before us.

And, to aid us in bearing this great charge, suffer me, before I close, to suggest one or two hints for our own conduct, which, as always, so now in some sort especially, seem to be essential.

And first, my reverend brethren, let me say, that in times like these, we should be most earnest to cultivate a real union amongst ourselves. In separation

there must on earthly grounds be weakness; and the blessing of the God of peace cannot rest on a divided house. And let us remember, that to secure this union, we must watch carefully against the causes of separation. On one of those causes (I mean, separate action in our voluntary associations for religious works), I addressed you at some length last year. For your kind consideration of the plan I then suggested, and for your willingness to try its working in the five rural deaneries in which we assembled to discuss it, I sincerely thank you. Practical difficulties in the way of its accomplishment convinced me that we are not yet ripe for the full blessing of such visibly united action, and, as you know, I therefore withdrew the plan. But I cannot regret that your attention was called to it, for it has, I think, tended in various ways to draw us all nearer to each other; to fill our minds with a greater longing for unity; and so, it may be, to hasten on the time when we shall, please God, have this privilege of evidently, and, in our very instruments of service, “minding all the same thing.”

Still, whilst I thankfully acknowledge our increased union, there is much left for us to do, if we would really be at one. There must be amongst us much cultivation of personal intercourse, much readiness to bear, for the sake of the common bond, with the varieties which must spring from the necessary variations of individual character. Above all, there must

of course be a hearty adoption of the doctrines and a steady observance of the practices of our Church. Personal impressions must not lead us to tamper with this truth, or to humour that article. We must not venture at our own will to omit this sentence from the service, or accommodate that feature of our apostolical communion to the inclination of sectarians around us. We must neither ape the formalities of Rome, nor diminish one jot of our firm belief in the true grace of Christ's holy sacraments. We must be honest Church-of-England men in our belief and in our practice.

Suffer me, my reverend brethren, to add, that if united action be indeed a thing of moment, it becomes us especially to guard against the introduction of new causes of disunion, which may add fearful bitterness to those which, alas, before existed, and widen breaches which we fondly hoped were closing up. Of these, there must be always danger proportioned to the vigorous acting of religious feeling. For, unless the individual will so quickened is at the same time softened and restrained by a deep humility, it will ever be breaking forth into some peculiarity of tenet or some eccentricity of conduct; and these will soon become, even in the best men, new causes of ruinous disunion in the Church. That such dangers now beset us, I am sadly and unwillingly convinced. Surely it must be so, if there has been amongst us a tendency to introduce into our sacred

offices peculiar customs, uncommanded in our rubrics, unsanctioned by our fathers, unpractised by our brethren in the Church. Such conduct must, of necessity, put unity in peril. For if they be points of moment, then, with no commission to warrant our so doing, we gravely censure others: if they be trifles, then, for the sake of trifles, we wantonly disturb the Church's peace, and provoke a mischievous reaction. And if, at the same moment, there is seen an inclination to depreciate all that is peculiarly Anglican; to exalt what, to say the least, borders upon those impurities of faith and practice, which, through God's grace, and in the strength of their manly Saxon hearts, our forefathers cast off,—then is our danger greater still. But it is greatest, my reverend brethren, if there be growing up on any side a hankering after those corruptions of the faith which issued of old in the papacy itself; a longing for a visible personal centre of union as the condition of the unity of Christendom; a shrinking from the simple boldness of statement, which marks the declaration of the gospel of God's grace throughout the inspired epistles; a tendency to confound that faith, which alone justifies, with the crowning grace of charity, in the burning brightness of which faith should issue; if there be a studious inculcation of that which, in this most mistaken sense, some unhappily have learned to speak of as “the great doctrine of justification by works;” if there be, lastly, a disproportioned

care for the outer parts of our religion, combined with any inclination to depreciate its individual spiritual life in every heart in which it dwells ; — surely, if there be but a suspicion of these things,—there is ground for watchful caution upon our parts : a caution which should act, not in leading us to reject what we suppose are the peculiar views of others ; (for all mere negative religion is a poor thing at the best ;) still less in making us willing to suspect, with party readiness, those who differ from us, or to impute to them lightly, with party bitterness, such fearful errors ; but in leading us to embrace for ourselves, with a more earnest hold, and to exhibit to others, in a sharper outline, that positive and substantial form and body of Christian truth which will be our safeguard from errors on each side, and which, of God’s mercy, is so well set forth in our own articles and liturgy.

Marked, indeed, was the training by which the holy men who have left to us this precious legacy were fitted for their work ; bitter was the struggle through which they for themselves discovered their deliverance from “ the body of this death ; ” scorching were the fires of personal suffering through which they were brought out into the large room which we, of God’s goodness, have so peacefully inherited ; and thus was there a broad impress of reality stamped upon their views of doctrine ; whilst, by God’s special mercy, they were kept clear from material error, on

the one side, by their acquaintance with Puritan excesses, as, on the other, by their knowledge of the deep corruptions of the Papacy. With them, my reverend brethren, let us hold fast, with thankful hearts, the clear, simple, well-marked character of old Church-of-England piety. Yes, my reverend brethren, may this, through God's grace, be wrought deeply into each one of us; may we ourselves be indeed dwelt in by His grace; may we be men of earnest prayer, men of a large and unsuspected charity to all; may the cross of Christ be every thing to us ourselves; may we bear stamped upon our lives the marks of a holy, courageous, humble, self-denying faith; that, having borne meekly His blessed yoke for our hour of service, we too, being washed in His precious blood, may enter into His rest, and be found indeed amongst His saints at His coming.

THE END.

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